

# **Candidate Selection, Intraparty Competition and Incumbency Turnover:**

## **Analysis of the Belgian Lower House Elections**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the effects of candidate selection on intra-party incumbency turnover. In the intra-party context, we expect to see competition among candidates for selectors' support. However, competition levels may vary over different types of candidate selection processes. Based on the US case, some authors argue that highly inclusive selectorates produce less competition and are more advantageous to incumbents (Ansolabehere et al. 2007; Herrnson, 1997). Recent research on list PR systems contradicts this claim (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). This article contributes to this research with a detailed account of this relation in flexible-list systems. We distinguish between four types of candidate selection outcomes for incumbents: realistic, marginal, or unrealistic list positions, and de-selection. The analysis is based on the case of the Belgian Lower House (1987-2010). The results show that incumbents rarely get de-selected in selection methods with member influence, which is in line with findings in majoritarian systems.*

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines the effect of candidate selection methods on intra-party incumbency turnover. The latter concept refers to de-selection of incumbents, and is related to the level of competition in intra-party candidate selection. Party selectorates might prefer to trade some of their incumbent MPs for promising non-incumbent challengers to ensure the influx of new ideas. But in which cases is intra-party competition highest? Which candidate selection methods activate party selectorates to de-select incumbents?

Intra-party de-selection of incumbents has important consequences for the overall level of turnover in the legislative arena. Determinants of legislative turnover are still contentious issues in political science. Scholars have extensively discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of high turnover rates (Putnam, 1976; Somit et al., 1994), and empirical research covers both US and European cases (Heinsohn and Freitag, 2012; Manow, 2007; Matland and Studlar, 2004).

These studies contributed to the knowledge on turnover determinants, but seem to ignore the effects of intra-party candidate selection. Matland and Studlar (2004: 95-96) shortly discuss intra-party defeat as a source for legislative turnover, but amalgamate the effects of ballot type, which is related to the electoral system, and ballot access, which is related to intra-party candidate selection (Shomer, 2009). Candidate selection processes are, however, separate institutions that deserve to be examined in isolation of the electoral system at hand.

With regard to intra-party candidate selection processes, we would always expect to see competition between aspirant-candidates for the support of selectors (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). However, competition levels may vary over different types of candidate selection methods. Some authors argue that inclusive selection methods such as primaries tend to produce low competition and are more advantageous to incumbents (Ansolabehere et al.,

2007; Kenig, 2009). Furthermore, decentralized candidate selection also breeds low competition, as appears from evidence on the cases of Canada, the United Kingdom and the US (Carty et al., 2000; Herrnson, 1997; Ohman, 2004).

But previous research on intra-party competition suffers from a number of shortcomings. Most studies have only examined the effect of intra-party competition on turnover in the extremely inclusive US context. In continental Europe with its typical list proportional electoral systems, primary elections or other highly inclusive selection methods are less common (Indridason and Sigurjónsdóttir, 2014). In addition, the concept of incumbent de-selection is not as straightforward in list PR systems as in majoritarian systems. In first-past-the-post systems, for example, incumbents can either be re-nominated or de-selected by the party selectorate. In multimember districts, party ballots often contain higher numbers of list slots with varying degrees of re-election chances, which implies more selection outcomes for incumbents than the simple dichotomous re-nomination/de-selection.

This paper aims to fill this lacuna and analyzes the effects of intra-party candidate selection methods on incumbency turnover in the flexible list system of Belgium (1987-2010). On the basis of data on legislative composition and candidate lists, we examine which incumbents of the Belgian Lower House are re-selected in realistic list positions, relegated to marginal or unrealistic list positions, or finally de-selected. De-selection or list relegation of incumbents is believed to be very rare in Belgian political parties (De Winter, 1988). However, no attempts have been made to test this claim based on the analysis of candidate lists for Belgian elections.

### **Intra-party incumbency turnover in list proportional systems**

At the end of every legislative term, incumbents seeking re-election turn towards their parties' selectorate for ballot access. The party selectorate, defined as the intra-party body that selects candidates, estimates the costs and benefits of re-selecting incumbents. Some of the obvious benefits are their electoral appeal and legislative experience. The incumbency advantage in elections is the most important reason for parties to re-nominate incumbents (Somit et al., 1994).

However, party selectorates can also have reasons to de-select incumbents. Candidate selection is the mechanism through which parties punish MPs who displayed dissident behavior or caused damage to the party image. Some parties might even commit themselves to automatically de-select a portion of their incumbent MPs and replace them by non-incumbent challengers. Reasons for incumbent de-selections are the input of new candidate profiles to the party list, or fresh ideas to the party in public office. At least some level of intra-party competition would also lead to higher party responsiveness by MPs.

Detecting intra-party incumbency turnover in single-member district systems is straightforward: all incumbents who are being replaced by intra-party challengers in their electoral districts are cases of incumbent de-selection. Identifying these cases is more difficult in proportional representation systems with multimember districts. Party lists with large numbers of candidate slots provide party selectorates with a variety of options for dealing with incumbents. Incumbent MPs may get de-selected, which is easily identifiable through absence on the party list in subsequent elections. If the party selectorate instead chooses to re-select incumbents, there are still multiple outcomes.

A first outcome is that incumbents are assigned to list positions with realistic chances of getting elected. Whether or not a list position can be considered as realistic depends on the electoral system and party strength in the district (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). Realistic positions

in PR systems bear some resemblance to the concept of safe seats in majoritarian systems. In both cases, ‘an electable position is one that the party traditionally wins’ (Taylor, 1996: 336). In closed-list PR systems, it suffices to assess how many seats the party is expected to win in the district. If a party can realistically hope for four seats, then the first four positions on the list can be considered realistic. In semi-open list PR systems, the exercise gets more complicated as the list rank order is no longer the only criterion by which seat allocation is determined. However, it remains difficult in these ‘closed-list systems in disguise’ to overcome the list rank order by means of preference votes (Crisp et al., 2013: 658).

Secondly, incumbents in marginal positions still have a chance of obtaining a seat in parliament, but the outcome strongly depends on both the party’s and the incumbent’s election result. These positions are located right after the realistic ones. If the party realizes a significant upward swing, this might result in additional seats and consequently these list positions might yield a legislative seat. Thirdly, there is a group of anonymous, lower positions on the candidate list with virtually no chances of getting elected. Because these list slots do not give any seat prospects, they can be considered unrealistic list positions.

In sum, we distinguish three types of candidate list positions in list PR systems. As a result, incumbency turnover can take on different forms in these electoral systems: party selectorates can not only de-select its incumbents, but relegate them to less attractive list positions. While this typology might have its applications for analyzing party lists in flexible or closed-list PR systems, it also has its limitations since the delineation of realistic and marginal positions strongly varies over different cases of the same electoral system. In Belgium, for instance, the last position on the list is often considered important by party selectorates and voters (Wauters et al., 2004). As a result, the operationalization of realistic, marginal and unrealistic positions should always be considered a case-specific endeavor. This makes the construction of a general typology of list positions all the more challenging.

## **Candidate selection and incumbency turnover: theory and hypotheses**

Candidate selection is the core activity that distinguishes political parties from any other type of political organization (Sartori, 1976). The evolution of selection methods has been extensively studied (e.g. Bille, 2001; Gallagher and Marsh, 1988). The most cited analytical framework for comparative analysis has been developed by Rahat and Hazan (2001). Their model disentangles four dimensions of candidate selection, among which centralization and inclusiveness of the selectorate are the most important ones.

### *Inclusiveness of the selectorate*

The selectorate, on the one hand, is the body that selects the candidates, and can be composed of only one person, or several people, up to the entire electorate of the nation. This dimension can be measured on a continuum from exclusive selectorates, where a very limited group of selectors take control, to inclusive selectorates, such as party members or the electorate.

There is, however, no consensus on the relation between the inclusiveness dimension and intra-party competition. A first group of authors finds that highly inclusive selection methods such as primaries lead to lower competition (Kenig, 2009; Obler, 1974). They argue that incumbents have more re-selection chances in primaries than in more exclusive selection methods due to the nature of competition. Primaries are more publicly organized and attract more mass media attention (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). As a result, building personal reputations becomes important, which benefits incumbents vis-a-vis non-incumbent challengers. In addition, the aspect of personal communication and network with selectors reinforces this competitive advantage. Large selectorates (e.g. party members) are difficult to

build a personal connection with, which makes it difficult for challengers to convince selectors to support their nomination bid.

The effects of primary elections have been extensively studied in the US context (e.g. Banks and Kiewiet, 1989; Gerber and Morton, 1998). This is not surprising, since primary elections have been used for selection procedures in almost all US state and federal offices over the last century. With regard to competitiveness, US research has shown that, as is the case in general elections, a large incumbency advantage exists in primary elections (Ansolabehere et al., 2007). This advantage has grown over the course of the twentieth century and helps to explain the declining competition in primary elections. However, there is a lack of knowledge on the consequences of these inclusive selection methods outside the US context (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich, 2006).

And indeed, a second group of authors studying proportional electoral systems are not convinced that primaries lead to low competition levels. Kristjánsson (1998) argues that inclusiveness instead increases intra-party competition, making incumbents far less secure in their seats. Indridason and Kristinsson (2013) find no support for either a decline or increase of intra-party competition in primaries. Others argue that highly inclusive selection methods lead to more moderate levels of competition (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Rahat et al., 2008).

In addition, this second group has argued that competition in exclusive selection methods is lower than in the case of primaries (Rahat, 2009). This is explained by the lack of ‘popular democratic legitimacy’ of these exclusive selectorates (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 135): small nominating committees invoke the image of smoke-filled rooms where the inner party circle takes all the decisions without any regard for the will of the larger party organization. This may lead to increased intra-party factionalism and decreased trust by party members and supporters. To counter this perception, small nominating committees need to legitimize their

decisions by drafting candidate lists that will get wide support within party ranks (Matthews and Valen, 1999). As a result, candidate lists will mainly be composed of incumbents, since this will not endanger internal status quo and also serves the common good of the party in electoral terms. Rahat et al. (2008) found empirical evidence for this argument based on candidate lists from Israeli parties.

In sum, the literature suggests that, in proportional electoral systems, primaries lead to medium levels of competition and small nominating committees to low competition. Are there any candidate selection methods available that result into high intra-party competition? According to the same authors, competition will be highest in a third category of inclusiveness where candidate selection is dominated by party delegates (Rahat and Hazan, 2005). With delegates, non-incumbent challengers have a higher chance of being recognized than in primaries, and they can still build a network with many of their selectors (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). Moreover, delegates are often appointed by members or other lower party echelons, which releases this type of selectorate from the legitimacy problems encountered by highly exclusive nomination committees.

We formulate three hypotheses on the effects of inclusiveness of the selectorate on intra-party competition in the candidate selection process:

**H1.** Highly exclusive candidate selection methods with small nominating committees have the lowest levels of incumbency turnover.

**H2.** Candidate selection methods with party delegates have the highest levels of incumbency turnover.

**H3.** Highly inclusive candidate selection methods with member involvement have medium levels of incumbency turnover.



### *The level of centralization*

Centralization measures the influence of local party branches in candidate selection processes. In highly centralized methods, the national party level has complete control over candidate nomination. In decentralized candidate selection methods, however, the role of the national level is limited and local branches organize their nomination processes autonomously.

With regard to the effects of centralization on intra-party competition, the literature states that decentralization breeds low levels of competition (Carty et al., 2000; Herrnson, 1997; Ohman, 2004). Territorially decentralized processes are being fought out in geographically smaller areas which reduces the number of competitors incumbents have to face. In addition, while incumbents might have the aura of being indispensable in their own district party organizations, national party organizations look at their MPs from a wider distance. National party selectorates are therefore less reluctant to de-select or relegate incumbents who are dominant within their own electoral districts.

While there is no consensus on the relation between district magnitude and the level of centralization (Lundell, 2004; Shomer, 2014), the selectorate at the district level is usually the dominant one in the candidate selection process (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Hix, 2004). This implies that the incumbency advantage is stronger in highly decentralized electoral systems with small districts. However, as there are various real-world examples of candidate selection methods where both the national and district level are involved, we still need to examine the effects of district magnitude and centralization separately.

**H4.** Highly decentralized candidate selection methods have the lowest levels of incumbency turnover.

## **The Belgian electoral system and political parties**

The Belgian electoral system has recently experienced a number of electoral reforms, but can still be characterized as a flexible-list system. Belgian voters have the choice to either cast one or multiple preference votes for party candidates on the same list, or to endorse the rank order established by the selectorate through a list vote (Shugart, 2005). Inter-party seat allocation is determined by the number of ballots with preference or list votes the party list has received. In theory, intra-party seat allocation is determined by both list order and the number of preference votes, but the threshold of preference votes to overcome the list order is reached very infrequently. This led some scholars to characterize flexible-list systems as closed-list systems in disguise (Crisp et al., 2013).

While the importance of rank order has diminished over time (Wauters and Weekers, 2008), list positions are still very important in the (re-)election prospects of Belgian election candidates. If candidates receive a specified number of preference votes, they automatically get elected. Otherwise, party list votes are assigned to the highest ranked candidates until they reach the specified amount of votes needed for election. In 2002, an electoral reform diminished the weight of list votes in order to increase the impact of preference votes on intra-party seat allocation, but since then the number of candidates who have beaten the rank order is still limited (Fiers and Van Hecke, 2013). The ongoing importance of rank order makes the intra-party candidate selection process all the more important in determining who will get elected.

We collected data on Belgian candidate selection methods on the basis of party regulations and internal documents, the analysis of press articles and existing literature. From 1987 until 2010, there has been considerable variation in both the inclusiveness of the selectorate and

centralization levels of Belgian parties, possibly explained by the peculiar reality of separate regional party systems for Flemish and francophone parties. In any case, the importance of candidate selection and the variation in applied selection methods makes the Belgian case all the more interesting for examining the relation between candidate selection methods and incumbency turnover.

Various Belgian parties allow their party members to participate in the candidate selection process, usually through the use of member polls. This system implies that members have the possibility to either ratify or reject model lists drafted by more exclusive nominating committees (De Winter, 1988). While this system was quite popular in both the Flemish and francophone Christian democratic party, the green parties and Flemish liberals have experimented with inclusive primary elections in the 1990s (Verleden, 2013).

There are also examples of selection methods involving party delegates. The Flemish socialists, for example, have been applying a procedure where candidate lists are to be ratified by an assembly of member delegates. But also the Flemish Christian democrats have used these assemblies for the first three elections (1987, 1991, 1995) included in the analysis (Deschouwer, 1993). Finally, some parties have appointed small and exclusive party committees as party selectorates. The selectorate of the Walloon liberals, for example, was composed of the presidents of the various party components during the largest part of the period under investigation. They were entitled to appoint the top candidates on party lists, and in a final step of the selection process to approve the final candidate lists (Vandeleene et al., 2013).

In terms of centralization, there are several examples where both the district and the national party level are involved in the selection process. A typical example are the Flemish Christian democrats, where during the seven studied elections the district level initiates the selection

process by drafting a first list proposal, and the national level can either modify or ratify this list before it gets presented to the party members. The highest level of centralization we encountered in the Belgian case was where the national party level had veto right in the final phase of the selection process. Since 1995, the Flemish socialists have been applying this type of selection method. The Flemish liberals, on the other hand, have a strong tradition of decentralized methods where the role of the national party level is very limited. Even during the early elections of 1987 and 2010, no national veto power was detected.

Party groups in the Belgian Lower House are characterized by high levels of legislative voting unity (Depauw, 2002). In theory, one expects that dissident legislative behavior by MPs has an impact on their de-selection prospects: party elites may sanction incumbents who refused to follow the party line during the previous legislative term. However, in the Belgian case this predictor should be considered less relevant in empirical analysis since legislative discipline has been very strict among the party groups in the Lower House. In fact, Depauw (2002: 230) found that even the most dissident incumbent MPs were not sanctioned with lower list positions. As a result, we leave out legislative discipline as predictor in the analysis and focus instead on the procedural aspects of intra-party candidate selection.

## **Data**

Data on the candidate selection outcomes of incumbents were drawn from the KANDI-dataset, which contains both political as socio-economic information on party candidates for Belgian Lower House elections since 1987. With regard to the dependent variable, which measures the outcome of candidate selection for incumbents, there are four categories: (1) Realistic list positions, which are located at the top of the list and yield a substantially higher chance of getting elected than lower ranked candidates; (2) Marginal list positions, located

right after the realistic positions and the very end of the list; (3) Unrealistic list positions; (4) De-selection.

This categorization is based on the assumption that Belgian parties themselves distinguish between different types of list positions, using previous district results as benchmarks (Maddens et al., 2014; Put and Maddens, 2013). For example, if a party won four seats in the district in the previous election, the first four positions could be considered realistic. The number of seats won in the previous election thus directly determines the number of realistic positions on the list. The candidate in fifth position, however, could be considered marginal: he/she stands a chance of getting elected on the condition that his or her number of preference votes is sufficiently high, and/or the party realizes an upward swing in the district. Additionally, the Belgian case has known many examples of candidates at the bottom of the list managing to get elected instead of higher ranked candidates (Wauters et al., 2004). Belgian parties seem to have the tradition of assigning these highly visible final positions to electorally popular politicians. Both the fifth and final position will in this case be considered marginal positions.

The remainder of list positions can be considered unrealistic, as the candidates assigned to these positions have a very unrealistic chance of getting elected. Of course, there is some level of competition taking place in these seats between aspirant-candidates who are interested in getting on the party list, but this usually does not involve incumbent MPs or other serious contenders. Finally, incumbents that did not get selected constitute the fourth category of the dependent variable, de-selection.

On the basis of candidate lists for the Belgian Lower House elections (1987-2010), candidate selection outcomes for all the incumbents of eight Belgian parties<sup>1</sup> were analyzed. The official documents of the Lower House were collected to delineate the group of incumbents from the



The second scale measures the level of centralization in the candidate selection process (Figure 2). The highest level of centralization is reached when the national party dominates the final step in the selection process, for example, through last-minute modification of candidate lists or by practicing veto power. The other end of the continuum are highly decentralized methods where the district party autonomously drafts lists without national influence. The middle category groups selection methods where candidate lists are the product of interaction between the national and district level.

District magnitude, age, sex, being an incumbent member of government and holding other parliamentary offices are the other independent variables that need to be taken into account. First, district magnitude is an important control variable as it also determines the nature of intra-party competition between candidates. The smaller the district, the closer the competition will resemble single-member districts. In larger districts, multiple incumbents compete for realistic positions which increases the odds of de-selection or relegation to lower list positions.

Candidate selection outcomes might also be related to personal characteristics of incumbents. Previous research found evidence for gender effects in de-selection decisions (Vanlangenakker et al., 2013). Women are more likely to be de-selected by the party than men, since party selectors are often suspected to be less favorably disposed toward women's candidacies (Bochel and Denver, 1983). Furthermore, the age of incumbents is also expected to play an important role in intra-party competition. Older incumbents will most definitely be more inclined to voluntarily retire, which should result in a strong age effect for the fourth category of the response variable. As the group of incumbents includes members of government, the analysis will also control for the effect of this group on turnover chances. Members of government are often leading politicians within their parties, and received considerable media attention during the preceding legislative term. Therefore, we expect this

group to have significantly lower odds of getting de-selected or assigned to marginal/unrealistic list positions.

Finally, the analysis will also take into account whether incumbents either switched to other political offices during their term in the Lower House, or gained other parliamentary offices in a concurrently organized election.<sup>4</sup> The availability of parliamentary offices is relatively high in the Belgian political opportunity structure. Incumbent Lower House MPs may choose to move to another assembly, or their party may consider moving them instead of running for Lower House again. These incumbents are often referred to as level-hoppers who already moved to another level but still decided to run for election for their previous parliament to support the party list (Fiers, 2001). Party selectorates might decide to assign marginal or even unrealistic places to these incumbents. And if they get elected, these candidates will not always take up their seat. Level-hoppers could therefore inflate the number of relegated or de-selected incumbents in our dataset. As a result, the analysis will include a binary predictor identifying incumbents that switched to other parliamentary offices during the legislative term. In this way, we are able to account for these unreal forms of de-selection.

## **Analysis**

Our data on candidate selection outcomes for Lower House incumbents (1987-2010) indicate that there is a strong overrepresentation in the category of realistic positions on party lists. Table 1 shows that 59.6% of incumbents in our data sample (N=1237) end up in these highly attractive list positions, where re-election chances are extremely high. This demonstrates that party selectorates are highly inclined to reserve these list positions to MPs with at least some previous experience in the Lower House. Only 4.8% of the incumbents were assigned to marginal list positions, and incumbents in unrealistic positions on the list only made up 6% of



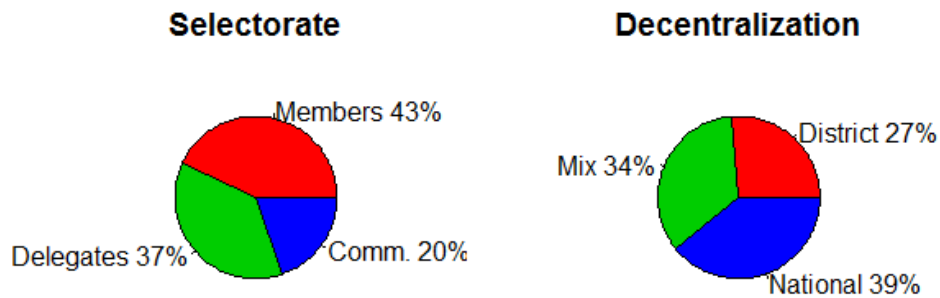
the sample. De-selection, which constitutes the fourth response category, is the second largest group with 29.6%. However, we already mentioned that these de-selected incumbents are not only victims of intra-party competition, but sometimes hop to another parliament or voluntarily retire from politics.

**Table 1: Candidate selection outcomes for Belgian Lower House incumbents (1987-2010)**

	#	%
Realistic positions	737	59.60
Marginal positions	60	4.84
Unrealistic positions	74	5.97
De-selection	366	29.59
N	1237	100

But how are these selection outcomes linked to the nature of candidate selection methods? Figure 3 depicts the distribution of incumbents over the three categories of selectorate and centralization. With regard to inclusiveness of the selectorate, 43% of these incumbents were selected through procedures involving party members, such as primaries or member polls. This is the outcome of the democratization in candidate selection within various Belgian parties during the 1990s. While systems with party delegates were also relatively popular between 1987 and 2010, the exclusive nomination committees only controlled the selection process for 20% of the incumbents.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Belgian Lower House incumbents over candidate selection methods**



In terms of centralization, the majority of Belgian candidate selection methods were to some extent controlled by the national party level: 39% of incumbents were selected by exclusively national selectorates, and another 34% were a combination of district and national party level selectorates. Roughly a fourth of Lower House incumbents were selected without any form of national party intervention.

While Figure 3 shows considerable variation in candidate selection methods, the question is how these dimensions determine the level of intra-party competition. Bivariate analysis shows that only the level of centralization is significantly associated with selection outcomes ( $\chi^2=17.1$  ;  $P<0.01$ ). In highly centralized methods, a higher proportion of incumbents ends up in marginal and unrealistic list positions than in mixed and decentralized methods. This indicates that competition is considerably higher in centralized candidate selection methods.

Other significant bivariate associations are found for gender ( $\chi^2=29.2$  ;  $P<0.001$ ), holding other office ( $\chi^2=160.3$  ;  $P<0.001$ ), being incumbent member of government ( $\chi^2=10.7$  ;  $P<0.05$ ) and age (Spearman's  $\rho=0.3$  ;  $P<0.001$ ). First, while only 18.3% of incumbents in the data sample are women, 40.5% of incumbents in unrealistic positions are women. It seems that selectorates would rather shuffle their female incumbents to these lower positions than their male counterparts. This type of gender-effect was not found for other candidate selection

outcomes. Secondly, holding another office is also highly associated with the dependent variable. In marginal and unrealistic positions as well as the group of de-selected incumbents, there is an overrepresentation of incumbents who moved to other parliaments during the Lower House legislative term or concurrent with its re-election. Thirdly, incumbent members of government are generally more assigned to realistic list positions (69.4%) and significantly less de-selected by their party selectorates (19,7%). Finally, age has a significant positive correlation with selection outcomes, which shows that older incumbents are associated with lower list positions and de-selection.

Table 2 displays the results of a multinomial logit model with realistic list positions as reference category. As there are three other response categories in the dependent variable, three coefficients are estimated for each of the predictors. Selectorate and centralization both have a significant effect on candidate selection outcomes for incumbents, but the findings are not always in line with the formulated hypotheses.

As for inclusiveness of the selectorate, candidate selection methods involving party members lead to the lowest competition: the odds of getting de-selected decrease by 54% in these democratic selection procedures compared to the reference category of highly exclusive nomination committees. A comparable effect was found for marginal positions, but the estimate is only borderline significant ( $P < 0.10$ ). The middle category of inclusiveness, where party delegates control the selection process, does not differ from the reference category.

**Table 2:** Multinomial logit model with candidate selection outcome for incumbents as dependent variable

	Marginal position		Unrealistic position		De-selection	
	Exp(B)	(SE)	Exp(B)	(SE)	Exp(B)	(SE)
<i>Selectorate</i> (ref: exclusive committees)						
Party delegates	0.711	(0.36)	1.045	(0.33)	1.022	(0.18)
Party members	0.504	(0.42)	0.682	(0.39)	0.462***	(0.23)
<i>Centralization</i> (ref: District)						
National/district	0.653	(0.37)	0.760	(0.35)	0.727†	(0.19)
National	1.762	(0.39)	2.332 *	(0.36)	1.424†	(0.21)
<i>Gender</i> (ref: male)	1.160	(0.37)	3.505 ***	(0.28)	0.983	(0.21)
<i>Age</i> (centred)	1.106***	(0.02)	1.065 ***	(0.01)	1.097***	(0.01)
<i>District magnitude</i>	1.069***	(0.02)	1.011	(0.02)	1.004	(0.01)
<i>Holding other parliamentary office</i>	8.372***	(0.34)	4.947 ***	(0.32)	11.042***	(0.20)
<i>Incumbent member of government</i>	0.399†	(0.50)	0.974	(0.35)	0.383***	(0.25)
Mc Fadden's Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>			0.157			

*Note:* Odds ratios and standard errors (between brackets) are shown. Reference category of dependent variable is 'Realistic position'. Significance: \*\*\* <0.001, \*\* <0.01, \* <0.05, † <0.10 .

The results for the centralization dimension are in line with previous findings by Hazan and Rahat (2010). Our data suggest that competition is substantially lower in decentralized selection methods. In highly centralized methods controlled by the national party level, the odds for incumbents to end up in unrealistic list positions more than double. Additionally, de-selection is also 50% more common than in decentralized candidate selection methods. In sum, the data on Belgian incumbents confirm H4 about the relation between centralization and intra-party competition. The other hypotheses, however, are not supported by these

findings: competition is lowest in highly inclusive selection processes, which supports the argument made by scholars on US primaries and the incumbency advantage.

With regard to the individual characteristics of incumbents, we find that both gender and age determine candidate selection outcomes. Female incumbents have significantly higher odds to be assigned to unrealistic positions. So the gender-effect which was previously suggested by the bivariate analysis has been confirmed by the multivariate model. However, the data do not support the idea that women are more exposed to de-selection or relegation to marginal positions.

In addition, the estimates for age centered around its mean (49,7) are positive, indicating that the older the incumbent, the higher the odds that he/she will end up in lower list positions or de-selection. The effect is quite strong for de-selection: per one unit increase in age, the chances of getting de-selected increase by 9.7%. Older MPs will also be more inclined to retire from politics, which largely explains this age effect for de-selection. In sum, the predictors for individual characteristics show that the youngest and male incumbents are safest for intra-party competition and de-selection.

Finally, the model also controls for the effects of district magnitude, being incumbent member of government and holding other parliamentary office. While district magnitude only determines the odds of falling into marginal positions, its effect is relatively strong: per extra seat in the district, the odds of incumbents getting assigned to these risky list positions increase by 6.7%. This result makes sense: in small electoral districts, the visibility of incumbents is higher, which strengthens the incumbency advantage in elections and selections. In large districts with larger numbers of incumbents, however, it becomes easier for party selectorates to shuffle one or more of these incumbents to lower positions on the list where they have to battle for re-election. Not all incumbents in large districts are equally well-

known, which makes it easier to replace them with newcomers or alternative candidate profiles for reasons of ticket-balancing or turnover. However, party selectorates in large districts only move incumbents to marginal positions. If they would assign them to unrealistic positions, they risk that the incumbent would take the honorable way out and voluntarily retire, which in turn could lead to electoral penalty.

With regard to members of government, we only found a significant effect on the odds of getting de-selected. Self-evidently, incumbent ministers rarely get de-selected in subsequent elections. Finally, the strong effects of holding other offices on all three categories is not surprising either. Incumbents who switch to another parliament have signaled their disinterest in re-election to their party selectorates. Some of them get de-selected, which might indicate that it is simply not allowed to simultaneously be candidate for Lower House and the other assembly, or these MPs are not willing to invest in campaigns for seats they will not take up after all. Other incumbents may already hold other offices, but are still willing to run for office when asked by the party selectorate: even if the incumbents will not take up their seat in the Lower House, their presence on party lists may be crucial in getting additional votes and winning seats for other candidates.

## **Conclusion**

Candidate selection methods matter for intra-party competition and incumbency turnover. Both the inclusiveness of the selectorate as the level of centralization codetermine the incumbents' rate of success in candidate selection processes. As a result, these intra-party institutions have undeservedly been ignored in earlier research on the determinants of legislative turnover.

Surprisingly, the data on the Belgian Lower House seem to support earlier research on the US case: highly inclusive candidate selection methods with member influence generate the lowest competition. And while research on other list proportional systems has contradicted this claim, Belgian incumbents are safest in inclusive selection methods. More specifically, incumbents have lower chances on getting de-selected or assigned to marginal list positions if members participate in candidate selection. In addition, no significant differences were found between methods with party delegates and exclusive nomination committees.

Furthermore, the results for centralization are in line with previous research: incumbents are safer in decentralized candidate selection methods. Territorial intra-party decentralization breeds low competition in Belgian parties. In nationalized candidate selection processes, incumbents are more often assigned to unrealistic list positions, or de-selected altogether. District party selectorates are less inclined to de-select incumbents than national party selectorates because of the dominant position incumbents take up in district organizations.

The multivariate analysis also shows that district magnitude increases the odds of incumbents getting assigned to marginal list positions. Where the number of seats is high, the number of incumbents is also high and party selectorates will be more likely to de-select one of them to move newcomers forward. In small electoral districts (e.g.  $M=1$  or  $2$ ), on the contrary, selectorates will be more careful as de-selection of incumbents will more likely lead to electoral penalty. Incumbents are more visible in smaller districts: voters feel that they are directly represented by their MP(s), leading to high levels of accountability and visibility. Arguably, de-selecting incumbents in small districts has larger electoral consequences than is the case in large districts. As district magnitude grows, voters will cease to identify with one sole MP and both accountability as visibility will decrease.

In sum, the negative relation between inclusiveness of the selectorate and incumbency turnover is the most substantial result of this contribution. It implies that intra-party democracy, in the form of opening up candidate selection processes to members, comes at the expense of intra-party competition. An increasing number of studies has already discussed the undesired effects of intra-party democratization: decreasing representativeness of parties toward their voters (Spies and Kaiser, 2014), unrepresentative candidate lists (Rahat et al., 2008), and lower levels of intra-party cohesion, endangering governmental and parliamentary stability (Rahat, 2007). Even though intra-party democratization might contribute to confidence in parties among citizens and remedy party membership decline, it obviously has negative effects on other important democratic dimensions such as representation, responsiveness and competition (Hazan and Rahat, 2010).

Not only inclusive but also decentralized selectorates can be perceived as desirable from a normative democratic point of view. If candidate selection processes are strongly decentralized, citizens may feel more closely involved in intra-party decision making than in nationally organized candidate selections (Put et al., 2014). As selection takes place with a decentralized mechanism, voters feel their local interest are more preserved compared to the more remote selection processes at the national level. However, our analysis has shown that inclusive and decentralized candidate selection processes have a major drawback. They involve significantly lower levels of intra-party competition which will also lead to decreasing legislative turnover. As a consequence, there may be less room for fresh ideas in parliament and legislatures may suffer from legitimacy problems. Thus, while internal democracy may sound like a noble goal to political parties, it clearly has detrimental effects on representative democracy in general.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Selected parties are: (Open) VLD/PVV – Flemish liberals; PRL/MR – Walloon liberals; SP/SP.A – Flemish socialists; PS – Walloon socialists; CVP/CD&V – Flemish Christian democrats; PSC/CDH – Walloon Christian democrats; AGALEV – Flemish greens; ECOLO – Walloon greens. These parties were withheld on the basis of their permanent representation in parliament from 1987 until 2010.

<sup>2</sup> A particularity of the Belgian electoral system is that voters are presented with a list of effective as well as substitute candidates. These substitutes are also rank ordered on the basis of their preference votes, after the distribution of list votes. If an MP becomes member of government, resigns or dies, he or she will be replaced by the first substitute. As a result, we consider the first substitute candidate as a realistic position.

<sup>3</sup> The categories in these scales are largely based on the integrated six-point scale of candidate selection methods developed by Shomer (2009).

<sup>4</sup> Being a federal state, Belgium has a set of regional assemblies where incumbent Federal Lower House MPs could move to instead of running for re-election in their familiar assembly. Since 1995, elections have been held for Flemish, Walloon and Brussels parliaments. While the first two of these regional elections (1995, 1999) were concurrently organized (i.e. on the same day as the elections of the Lower House), the federal and regional elections became non-concurrent after 1999. Federal MPs were free to run for regional elections and to take up office if they got elected. Moreover, the Belgian parliamentary system is bicameral, implying that there are two legislative assemblies at the federal level. Next to the Lower House, Belgium also has a federal Senate with its own election (since 2014 indirectly elected) and competences. While the elections of both federal assemblies have always been concurrently organized, the Senate provides Belgian politicians with an additional opportunity to move towards another parliamentary office.

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